

# Toms River Municipal Band

By Pat Johnson

In September, the Toms River Municipal Band will be celebrating their 60th Year performing free concerts at the Ocean County Library's Toms River branch. The band was started in 1964 by Franklin V. Fischer, musician and Ocean County Surrogate (1993-2002), and William Salter, musician and band director for Toms River North and South High Schools.

Musical Director and Conductor Frank Hughes remembers it well as he was a sophomore in high school when Salter recommended him to be part of the nascent band. Hughes plays the trumpet and he is the only member still active from those formative days.

Hughes went on to become assistant band director with Salter at Toms River North and then took over as director and conductor of the Toms River Municipal Band when Salter passed away in 1979—the band's 45th season.

“So this is a double anniversary for me,” said Hughes. The band is doing well with 28 professional

musicians that range in age from 30 to 75. The free concerts are given on the steps of the Ocean County Library during July and August and are funded through the Ocean County Parks and Recreation Department and Toms River Township.

Most concerts follow the same format, said Hughes, “We start with a major work to challenge the members, we have a soloist from the band perform and then some novelty pieces, always a Broadway Show tune and we always end the concert with ‘Stars and Stripes Forever.’”

The concerts are always held on a Thursday at 7 p.m. and dates for the concerts are: July 6, 13, 27; August 10 and 31.

August 10 is a special inside concert with the 18-piece jazz band made up of members within the band. As a special guest star, performer Jazz Guitarist Frank Cicala is the featured soloist. “He just finished recording with Stevie Wonder,” said Hughes. Hughes also conducts the jazz band.

## Toms River continued...



Toms River Municipal Bandleader Frank Hughes.  
Photo credit: Frank Hughes.

The 60th Anniversary Celebration will be held on Sept. 7 and promises to be a great bash. The band always performs a holiday concert at St. Josephs Church—the date to be announced.

Also, one of the concert dates is always a special Broadway tunes night but that date has not been set because Hughes' son will perform. He is a singer and actor appearing in 'Sister Act' at the Dutch Apple Theatre and it hinges on his performance dates. "Both my son and his twin sister sing medleys with the band," said Hughes.

Hughes comes from a musical family. His mother and father were both professional musicians based in Lakewood. "My father was a jazz guitarist and my mother was a concert pianist. They both played in the hotel bands in Lakewood. Lakewood in the '30s was a big winter retreat. They met on the bandstand. My mother was phenomenal. The Laurel in the Pines Hotel would send a driver to pick up my mother because she could read music and not all the musicians in the house band could. So here she was 14, 15, 16 years old and playing for entertainers. My Italian Grandmother didn't trust anyone so she would go with her."

Over the years, Toms River Municipal Band members have become like family. “Yes, we’ve developed friendships. There has not been a large turnover, once they start, they stay,” he said. “Most have been in the band eight or 12 years—I know some people in the band since high school, people I’ve taught and former students are in the band.”

Hughes recalls a family gaff.

“The house dance band was called The Vikings and the leader of the band was my uncle. They were rehearsing one afternoon when someone came in to audition for the band and he was turned down. My uncle turned down Frank Sinatra!”

Concerts are held in the open-air pavilion between the library and the historical library, a lovely space shaded by trees. “We average 250 to 300 people, they bring their lawn chairs, something to eat and a beverage. It’s always a good time.”